

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENNA 1777

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TAGS: PGOV, PFOR, AU, YO

SUBJECT: SLOVENE MINORITY CONTROVERSY: SPECIAL CENSUS

IN 1976 AND IMPACT OF ISSUE ON MARCH 2

ELECTIONS IN CARINTHIA

REF: A. VIENNA 594

B. VIENNA A-51, DATED FEB. 7, 1975

SUMMARY: THREE POLITICAL PARTIES REPRESENTED IN FEDERAL PARLIAMENT AGREED ON FEB. 26 TO HOLD "SPECIAL CENSUS" IN 1976 TO DETERMINE SIZE AND LOCATION OF SLOVENE MINORITY IN CARINTHIA AS CARINTHIAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN REACHES NEW HIGHTS OF RANCOR OVER MINORITY ISSUE IN FINAL DAYS BEFORE MARCH 2 BALLOTING. END SUMMARY.

1. NATIONAL AND CARINTHIAN PROVINCIAL LEADERS OF SOCIALIST (SPO), PEOPLE'S (OVP), AND FREEDOM (FPO) PARTIES, IN MEETING IN VIENNA FEB. 26 AT INVITATION OF CHANCELLOR KREISKY, AGREED IN PRINCIPLE TO CONDUCT "SPECIAL CENSUS" IN 1976 TO DETERMINE NUMERICAL SIZE AND EXACT LOCATION OF SLOVENE MINORITY IN CARINTHIA. PRESENT PLAN FORESEES SUBMISSION AND ADOPTION OF APPROPRIATE LEGISLATION IN PARLIAMENT BEFORE SUMMER OF 1975. STILL UNDECIDED IS WHERE "SPECIAL CENSUS" BY SECRET BALLOT IS TO BE CONDUCTED THROUGHOUT AUSTRIA
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OR TO BE LIMITED, FOR BUDGETARY REASONS, TO CARINTHIA,

STYRIA, AND BURGENLAND, PROVINCES CONTAINING MINORITY POPULATIONS. ANOTHER STILL TO BE RESOLVED QUESTION CONCERNS WHAT PERCENTAGE OF MINORITY IN INDIVIDUAL COMMUNITIES WILL BE NECESSARY FOR ERECTION OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGNS.

2. IN RECENT DAYS KREISKY HAS REGISTERED PUBLICLY HIS IRRITATION OVER REFUSAL OF SPOKESMEN OF SLOVENE MINORITY ORGANIZATIONS TO MEET WITH HIM CONCERNING STATUS OF MINORITY IN CARINTHIA. IN PRESS CONFERENCE EARLIER THIS WEEK KREISKY INDICATED THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY'S ELECTIONS IN CARINTHIA HE WOULD AGAIN INVITE MINORITY REPS FOR TALKS AND THAT MINORITY'S FEAR OF "SPECIAL CENSUS" WAS UNJUSTIFIED BECAUSE "MINORITY WAS ENTITLED TO SPECIAL TREATMENT REGARDLESS OF ITS SIZE." AT SAME TIME HE SAID THAT IF SLOVENES DID NOT WISH TO NEGOTIATE FURTHER WITH HIM, THEY COULD THEN GO TO HELL (KOENNEN MIR GERN HABEN). SLOVENE MINORITY REPS NOT UNEXPECTEDLY HAVE REITERATED THEIR POSITION IN FACE OF KREISKY IMPATIENCE, NAMELY THAT SOCIALIST PARTY'S EARLIER DISCUSSION OF POSSIBILITY OF "SPECIAL CENSUS" PROMPTED MINORITY WALKOUT IN FIRST PLACE AND THAT IMPASSE ON ISSUE REMAINS UNCHANGED.

3. IN CARINTHIA, FINAL PHASE OF ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN MARKED BY HEIGHTENED RANCOR, PARTICULARLY BETWEEN SOCIALISTS, ENGAGED IN UPHILL BATTLE TO HANG ON TO ITS ABSOLUTE MAJORITY, AND OPPOSITION PEOPLE'S PARTY, WHICH IS WAGING ON HOLDS BARRED STRUGGLE TO DEFEAT SOCIALISTS AT POLLS AND BREAK THEIR TRADITIONAL CONTROL OF PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT. SPEECHES BY RANKING CANDIDATES OF BOTH PARTIES HAVE BEEN INTERRUPTED BY DISTURBANCES FROM HOSTILE ELEMENTS IN AUDIENCES; OVP HAS SURFACED ALLEGED POLITICAL DEAL IN VENICE IN 1951 BETWEEN SOCIALISTS AND YUGOSLAV COMMUNISTS ON COOPERATION OVER MINORITY ISSUE; AND SLOVENE MINORITY LEADERS HAVE RECOMMENDED THAT ETHNIC SLOVENES VOTE EIGHER COMMUNIST OR SLOVENE UNITY TICKETS, SINCE SOCIALISTS, WHO WERE SUPPORTED IN PAST, HAVE NOW ADOPTED ANTI-SLOVENE POSITION ON MINORITY QUESTION.

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3. COMMENT: KREISKY'S DECISION TO FIRMLY COMMIT SOCIALIST NATIONAL PARTY TO CARINTHIAN NATIONALIST POSITION ON NEED FOR "SPECIAL CENSUS" REPRESENTS MAJOR VICTORY FOR CARINTHIAN SOCIALIST LEADERS WHO HAVE THEMSELVES TURNED SHARPLY TO POLITICAL RIGHT IN WAKE OF BILINGUAL ROAD SIGN IMBROGLIO OF 1972 AND SUBSEQUENT MAJOR DEFEAT OF SOCIALISTS IN COMMUNAL

ELECTIONS IN 1973. TIMING OF KREISKY DECISION AND
HIS POSTURING OF IMPATIENCE VIS-A-VIS SLOVENE MINORITY
SPOKESMEN HAS APPEARANCE OF LAST MINUTE EFFORT TO
BOLSTER SOCIALIST ELECTION PROSPECTS FOR MARCH 2.
INABILITY TO GAUGE HOW PUBLIC WILL REGISTER ITS
SENTIMENT IN ELECTION BOOTH OVER MINORITY ISSUE, WHICH
BECAME CENTRAL ISSUE IN CAMPAIGN, IS CAUSING MAJOR
UNEASE AMONG ALL PARTIES. EXPECTATION CONTINUES
THAT SOCIALISTS WILL LOSE AND PEOPLE'S PARTY WILL
AGAIN VOTES; MAGNITUDE OF SHIFT HOWEVER REMAINS BIG
UNCERTAINTY. HUMES

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